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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000306

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS NSC FOR MICHELE GAVIN
FOR GABARONE PASS PDROUIN
COMMERCE FOR KBURESS
ENERGY FOR GPERSON
TREASURY FOR DPETERS, RHALL, RABDULRAZAK
STATE PASS USTR FOR LISER, AGAMA
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR KSAMPLE
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN, MSTUCKART, JEDWARDS
STATE PASS TDA FOR EEBONG, DSHUSTER
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER
STATE PASS USAID FOR NFREEMAN, GBERTOLIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ASKING THE ROBBER TO INVESTIGATE HIS CRIME

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 6 PolCouns and PolOff met with Lagos based civic activists to discuss progress towards democratization and electoral reform. The activists likened expecting electoral reform from the present government of Nigeria to asking the robber to investigate his crime. They added that democratic reform must encompass constitutional reform because the present constitution was inherently flawed. The activists said the best way to obtain democratic change in Nigeria is to organize a mass movement. They admitted, however, that Nigerians are reluctant to agitate and demonstrate for reform as long as they do not know who will benefit from a change in regime. While admitting to a "failure of leadership," the absence of a clear alternative to the current regime remains an issue. Simply hoping that a strong candidate will emerge with time is not a promising strategy. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 6, PolCouns and PolOff met with Yinka Odumakin of the Afenifere Renewal Group, Dr. Josephine Okei-Odumakin of the Campaign for Democracy, and Olasupo Ojo of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights to discuss progress toward democratization and electoral reform in Nigeria. The activists said that progress toward electoral reform is completely stalled at present. Odumakin spoke of a "culture of impunity" in which no one had been punished for political violence or electoral fraud, and complained that there is no "due process" in Nigeria. Ojo added that talk of the "Rule of Law" by President Yar'Adua is pure propaganda. All agreed that most governors and 90% of the legislators had not been elected in a credible process any more than President Yar'Adua had been. Expecting these men to institute real electoral reforms, Okei-Odumakin said, was like asking the robber to investigate his own crime.

¶3. (SBU) Ojo pointed out that democracy does not start with elections but with the constitution. He described the current constitution as imposed by the military and pointed

out that it had never successfully been amended because it was designed to make change impossible. He said there could be no electoral reform without constitutional reform, adding that any constitution built on fraud would eventually fail.

¶4. (SBU) Ojo spoke of a "failure of leadership" in Nigeria and Odumakin advocated a mass movement from the grass roots to mobilize the population in favor of constitutional and electoral reform. When questioned as to why the Nigerian population had accepted the theft of the 2007 election, Ojo pointed out that the political parties are not transparent and there was no plausible alternative. All the major opposition candidates for president, he said, were perceived as being part of the system. Odumakin added that Nigerians are afraid to riot or even demonstrate peacefully when they do not know who will benefit from a change in government.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: While the analysis of the current situation was cogent, the absence of a clear alternative to the status quo remains an issue. Even when pressed on who they thought might serve as a credible alternative to the current president, none of the activists were willing to name names. They seemed to hope that "someone would emerge" when the time was right. Simply hoping that a strong candidate will emerge with time is not a promising strategy. End Comment.

¶6. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.

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BLAIR